



House Bill 4433 and House Resolution 24 Testimony

Susan R. Herman, Director

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Hadassah
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My name is Susan Herman and I am the Director of the Michigan Jewish Conference (MJC), an organization representing the public policy concerns of Michigan's Jewish communities. Betsy Kellman, Executive Director of Michigan's Anti-Defamation League, (ADL) asked me to also testify on behalf of the ADL since she was not able to be here today.

Both the MJC and the ADL strongly oppose House Bill 4433 and House Resolution 24, which would allow displaying the Ten Commandments on Public Property. We feel that this is not only a clear violation of the Constitution's First Amendment requirement of separation of church and state but also bad public policy.

We also strongly disagree with the description of the Ten Commandments as a historical document: it is sacred religious text of the Jewish and Christian faiths. In fact the Commandments do not just address secular matters, such as killing, adultery and stealing. Rather the first part of the Commandments concerns the religious duties of believers, worshipping the Lord G-d alone avoiding idolatry, not using the Lord's name in vain and observing the Sabbath Day.

With due respect to the bills sponsor, if the Ten Commandments were truly a historical document, there would not be any need for legislation to authorize its posting in public places.

Even if posting the Ten Commandments in public were constitutional it would do great damage to religious tolerance in America. Not all American's subscribe to religions that follow the Bible or the Ten Commandments. Millions of Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists and others in America adhere to religious, ethical and moral traditions that draw from a variety of text other than the Bible.

Further those religions that do adhere to the Ten Commandments follow very different versions of the laws. The ancient Hebrew text followed by Jews is very different from the language found in the King James Bible version accepted by most Protestant churches in America today. Further, Catholics and Lutherans follow yet another text altogether. If the legislation were passed, whose interpretation of the Ten Commandments would be displayed?

Finally we want to make it clear that our opposition to state-sponsored posting of the Ten Commandments does not arise out of hostility to the timeless values conveyed in Exodus 20:1–17. Rather, it arises out of a profound respect for the diversity of religions in America today and for the Constitution's legacy of religious liberty for all American's.